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B-7

Tammies tour Eastern Europe — effortlessly

By Betsy Kline
Post-Gazette Staff Writer

The Duquesne University Tumburians paraded a program of global song, dance and instrumental virtuosity last night at the Carnegie Music Hall that makes Disney's "It's a Small World" seem like a slow stroll around the block.

And yet the ensemble, 38 members strong, made its two-hour-plus program seem as effortless as a Saturday recreation at the local social hall. The rapport between the performers was readily apparent, but what makes the Tammies so appealing is their ability to project that rapport beyond the footlights

DANCE REVIEW

with broad smiles and lots of eye contact.

Fourteen countries in 20 numbers and umpteenth costume changes could easily become a blur, but the Tumburians put their particular stamp on each song, each dance, each strum of the tambura.

The evening began with several Croatian pieces, including a sword-dancing ensemble dance number from the Turquoise region, and ended quickly through a dazzling array of Slovenian, Serbian, Hun-

garian and Transylvanian dances and songs. The first half ended with a rousing Slovak village dance propelled by a male chorus strutting with delightful cockiness.

The second half of the program traveled to Greece for a medley of virile line dances, then to Macedonia, stopping in Bulgaria for an intriguing masked story dance, in Poland for a lyrical flirtation, in Romania for a marvelously high-stepping belt dance, in Moldova for a humorous women's character dance about gossiping magpies, and on to Russia and Ukraine.

Standouts abounded: Mark Spisic's three-stringed Russian demo

anchored a beautifully melodious showpiece. Vuk Kandic drew such sweet melodies out of the button accordion. And the versatile Kallman Magyar Jr. displayed his mastery of many ethnic instruments rarely heard in concert, including the intriguing Transylvanian trumpet-violin and the eerily beautiful fujara of Slovakia.

The Holiday's Hottest Ticket is a holiday last night at the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre. The Nutcracker, December 23-31, Nutcracker Hotline 456-2670. Official website: Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre.

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Farewell, Far Side: Larson's a rare species

LARSON FROM PAGE B-12

vulnerable only to clerks inspecting the name on his Visa card. He occasionally made public appearances early in his cartoon career. "The Far Side" is 35 years old, but stopped after a woman in a bunny suit cloaked him with a cream pie.

Slightly built, fair-skinned, gray-haired and bespectacled, the 44-year-old Larson is so nonchalant that even those who "know" what he looks like aren't sure what he looks like.

A few years ago, Larson came by the Natural History Museum in Washington, D.C. See expert Ron McGinley and others gave him the grand tour, proudly displaying their female-hyde jars. All the while, the reclusive cartoonist smiled, shyly but cordially, making "little cryptic comments, full of wit and intelligence," said McGinley.

The bee expert felt an instant kinship. When he told Larson that bees are "nature's flying genitalia," he could sense the wheels turning.

But what physical feature of Larson's did McGinley best remember? "I think he had a receding hairline," says the trained scientific observer.

• What kind of guy is Gary Larson? Before the 1979 debut of "The Far Side," Larson played the banjo in a Seattle lounge act known innocently as "Tom and Gary." He played with face turned from the audience. Even so, he led Apple, the exposure made him "nauseous every night for three years."

He isn't comfortable with celebrity. He isn't entirely comfortable with the idea that he's earned it.

John Morrissey, Larson's editor

at Andrews and McMeel, an affiliate of Universal Press Syndicate in Kansas City, Mo., says the cartoonist "is his own worst critic. He's never been comfortable or complacent."

• Is Gary Larson a religious person? Although his thoughts are unorthodox — his wife Toni once suggested stenciling "He Back in a Moment" on his forehead — many of Larson's fans believe his God must be Darwin. But in 1987, he told "Pacific Northwest" magazine that "B. Kilban is God."

Larson has acknowledged his admiration of several famous cartoonists, among them Mad Magazine's Don Martin and Playboy's Gahan Wilson. But if he ever had a spiritual alter ego, it was B. Kilban. One described as "America's maddest cartoonist," Kilban, who died at 53 in 1990, was a shy California art school dropout whose drawings of round-eyed tabby cats became a \$50 million craze by the mid 1980s.

Two Kilban cartoons show the amplexing relationship between his works and Larson's. One shows a black bear talking to a fish. The bear says, "Sometimes being covered with hair isn't as much fun as you think." Another shows an angel greeting a new arrival: "Welcome to heaven, Ernie! Have a brew! The bowling alley's to your left, and the pizza and breads will be here in a minute."

• Which is Gary Larson's favorite "Far Side"? One of Larson's favorite cartoons shows a Wild West gunfighter standing over his victim, asking, "OK, stranger, what's the circumference of the Earth? ... Who wrote 'The Odyssey' and 'The Iliad'? ... That's the average rainfall of the

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